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II. A GLIMPSE OF VILLAGE LIFE

(*a*) COURTYARD SCENE IN MARCH

(*b*) STAMPING MEALIES

[facing p. 17]

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the space between the huts, neatly smeared with dung, separated off from the next by a low wall, sometimes less than a foot high, or the remains of what was once a wall. Not all villages give an appearance of neatness. Sometimes, especially after a rainy season, the huts are dilapidated and greatly in need of repair; courtyards may be untidy-looking and only partially smeared, while often in summer flies are a veritable pest. It is considered unlucky to kill them. Native ideas of cleanliness also differ from those of Europeans: it is considered nothing for a baby to urinate on the hut floor, while hours spent in smoky huts give the cloths and blankets worn by women an unpleasant odour. Each household, the domain of a married woman, is independent, having its own fields and granaries. The household of the chief wife is opposite the main entrance; on either side of her in Raselaka's village are her two fellow wives; further to her left are the households of an orphaned sister's son to the village head, married to one of his daughters, and of his eldest son, whose wife is still cooking for her mother-in-law and has as yet no cooking hut. To the right, beyond the third wife of Raselaka, lives a stranger, Letavula, with his wife and mother. There is an extra hut for the young boys of the village and one behind the rest belonging to a woman 'married' to the second wife of Raselaka. The Lovedu have no ranking of wives apart from the chief wife (the mother's brother's daughter) and there is no division of the village into right- and left-hand sides as among Zulu.

There are well marked differences even on the outside between cooking and sleeping or reception huts. The latter all face the *khɔrɔ* and have a wooden door; they are well plastered, many having a veranda all round. The former have their backs to the *khɔrɔ*, a framework of reeds as a door, and are more roughly made, very often unplastered on the outside, so that the framework of wooden posts is clearly visible. On entering a sleeping hut, you find yourself in a pleasing apartment. The floor, the greater portion of which is generally to the level of a foot higher than that of the entrance, is well smeared, while beside the wall are one or two raised platforms used to place things on and sometimes also as seats. The well-plastered walls merge into the roof, forming a white dome. This dome has circular rims marking the cross-laths which, beneath the plaster, hold together the framework of closely packed rafters. Sometimes there are mural decorations and at intervals an outjutting shelf of clay or a peg. The floor of the hut of Raselaka is empty except for a double or waisted basket (*khirudwana*), a wooden platter of food, a lantern, and two smart suitcases. But on the shelves are blankets, a rolled-up sleeping-mat, some clothes and beadwork of the wife, and on the walls a calendar and a coloured picture of the King and Queen of England. You must not expect to find this latter sophistication in many villages, but likewise the smooth, plastered dome is now uncommon. New Government regulations against the cutting of trees for wood, and the men's general disinclination to put much work into a building they will inhabit only at intervals, between periods of service in the towns, are combining with other factors to doom to extinction these beautifully made huts. That of Letavula, newer than the others, is an ordinary *rondavel* with unplastered roof and supporting beams. He had a European bed, but has discarded it as too cold in winter.

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cold in winter. The veranda of the sleeping hut is used for storage. Here are pots of all sizes, many with lids glued down with dung, calabashes, sacks of corn on stands, medicinal roots, perhaps an old plough, a small grain basket on an inverted tripod of sticks, and a bag of reed pipes for dancing.

The contrast between sleeping and cooking huts is marked: whereas the former is relatively empty, cool and clean, the kitchen hut is generally rather untidy and, when a fire is burning, full of smoke. This is the domain of the housewife. Here are her cooking utensils—pots, baskets, wooden dishes, dishes of white enamel. At first the smoke deters you from entering, but the woman and her children sitting there appear to be quite at ease, so you summon up courage and go in. You splutter at first and your eyes water, but soon you grow accustomed to the atmosphere. You glance up at the unplastered roof and find it black from the smoke of many years. It is the home of countless cockroaches. Stuck in it are ears of corn and mealie cobs kept for seed, and many other articles, such as a cupping horn, some medicinal roots, some old arrows, and axe and spear of Sotho-worked iron kept as religious objects. On a platform of wood, out of the reach of white termites, are several bags of nuts and mealies, while a handbroom of asparagus fern lying near the hearth in the centre comes in useful from time to time for sweeping all the dirt into the fireplace. In this hut women sit at night; grandmothers sleep here with the children; here children are born and here they are often fed; here people lie when ill and here too they die.

A chair, native-made but after the European fashion, with seat of strips of thong, has been placed for you in a shady spot in the chief wife's courtyard. To be perched so high above ground when every one else sits on the floor is distinctly uncomfortable and out of place, but, in deference to the hospitality of your host in according you the honour of a chair, you feel you must occupy it. Four or five small, pot-bellied urchins with dirty noses range themselves near you to watch more closely the features and clothes of the European. One softly points out your peculiar nose to a companion, another comments on your shoes; altogether they find you and your ways absorbing. One small child holds aloof, screaming with fear when the rest try to force him to come near. With her back to the sun, a woman kneels beside a large pot of boiling water, deftly twirling a wooden twirler between her palms. Every now and then she stops to add a little of the fine, white mealie meal beside her by means of a ladle of calabash, for this is the first stage in the making of *vuswa*, cakes of thick meal, their staple food. The twirling prevents the formation of lumps. When the mixture becomes too thick for the twirler, a large, flat, wooden spoon is used with both hands. An aged and wrinkled old woman, mother-in-law of the one who is cooking, arrives from her garden with a basket on her head filled with the young leaves and male flowers of the pumpkin and three or four fresh cobs of mealies. The leaves and flowers are for relish for the meal; the cobs of maize she roasts in the fire for her grandchildren. She sits down, feet straight before her, and begins slowly to pull off the rough outer covering from the stalk of each leaf; it is then broken into two or three pieces and placed in a small, wide-mouthed pot.

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643 578 After the fire rite there follows the rite of opening the door, which will determine the identity of the heir. No one knows for certain who will succeed. Some nobles, availing themselves of the interregnum, mobilize their supporters, and all come fully armed, for there is sure to be some display of hostility. Even in 1896, at the accession of Mujaji III, a son of a wife of Mujaji II and great councillor marched upon the capital supported by the Mahasha, but there was no strife, as Mujaji III's followers were prepared. The rival claimants, in the presence of the [342] assembled people, go one by one to the hut in which the queen died and which (like one of the queen's huts even to-day) has two doors. They approach the door one by one, address the spirit of the deceased, saying who they are, and lightly touch the door. It is arranged that the most ambitious claimants go first, and those who are indifferent as regards their prospects last, the true heir to whom the door will open taking his place between them.

The spirit of the deceased, by opening the door, chooses the successor. The new queen, taking the axe, spear, and shield of her royal predecessors, escapes by the other door. She may have to flee, if the party of a rival is too strong, but in time she will be formally presented by a great councillor to the people. There is doubt as to the fate of the person who held the door from within: some say he must die, others that he is given a wife and sent out of the country. There is much uncertainty and secrecy about what happened in 1896; it is even doubted whether the door was opened. The reason lay in the fear of European intervention, for just previously the Boer General had been deceived and the lowveld tribes conquered, as described in Chapter I. Cowed by disaster, the Lovedu wisely decided to emphasize, not their own ritual, but the formal confirmation of the accession by the European.

643 578 173 The opening of the door, as known among neighbouring tribes, serves chiefly to resolve conflicts between rivals to the throne. It sometimes co-exists with institutional predetermination of the heir—for instance, where he must be the chief son of a wife married with special ceremonies and with cattle contributed by the whole tribe, the issue of a house in which the tribesmen all have a stake. In such circumstances conflicts arise, and European authority throws its weight on the side of 'constitutional arrangements' rather than 'coincidence'. In some tribes the opening of the door serves to strengthen the claim of the institutional heir; that is the case where there is no great massing of institutions behind the chief heir and conflicts are liable to break out if there are several claimants of standing. Among the Lovedu, succession was quite uncertain, the personal choice of the chief, not primogeniture, being stressed. The great son seldom succeeded, it is said, because the second child was favoured; and that is one explanation of the origin of the Mamaila, Sekhopo, and Rakhwadu tribes, for the great son was driven out of the country. In traditional history the 'Filler of the Rivers', who was chief son and seized the throne, had to make way for the 'Drainer of the Rivers', who proved to be the choice of his father and to whom the rain secrets had been imparted. Khashani, the great son, was expelled by Mugɔdɔ, his younger brother (we do not know whether he was the second son), of whom it is

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XVI. RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

(*a*) AT THE LILY SHRINE

(*b*) A TYPICAL LOUEDU SHRINE

[facing p. 289]